

Authority To Forgive Sins

Matthew 9:1-8

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

A visitor came to church one Sunday and confronted me after the service, “What right and authority do you have to forgive sins? Only God can forgive sins!” That accusation sounded a lot like what the scribes were saying to themselves in our text, doesn’t it?

Consider the situation in our text. Some people brought their friend, a paralytic, to Jesus because he could not get there on his own. So they brought him over on his mat. From Mark and Luke’s Gospels we learn that four friends had brought him to see Jesus, but when they could not get in through the door because of the crowd, they dug a hole through the roof and lowered the paralytic before Jesus.

Do you understand that they destroyed the roof to let the man down before Jesus! Do you understand the significance of that? Can you imagine going to someone’s home, trying to get inside to see someone, but the crowd was so close-packed that you could not get in, so you make a hole in their roof to lower your friend before the one speaking? These were not 21st Century US roofs.

Homes in that region would have had a stairs along the outside of the house that went up to a flat roof. It would have been a framework covered with thatch and then sealed with mud and maybe covered with clay tiles. It was an impressive amount of trouble these four went through to place their friend before Jesus.

What would it take to make you do something so drastic? Can you imagine the determination of these men to bring their friend before Jesus? Which of you would carry your buddy up to the roof and then break-in and lower him into someone else’s home? As I said, what kind of determination would cause you to do that? Jesus noticed too. *And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith.*

Did you hear that? Jesus noticed *their* faith. Jesus noticed *their* determination.

At great effort of time and energy expended, their paralyzed friend is now before Jesus. What do you think they did this for? Why did they go through all the trouble of bringing their paralyzed friend up onto the roof, of somehow getting a hole in that roof, and then ever so carefully lowering their **paralyze** friend before Jesus? What was it exactly they were looking to have happen to their **paralyzed**?

As we know, Jesus noticed their determination to get him there. Jesus saw more than their determination to bring their friend before Him – He saw their faith – He saw what was in their hearts. How does our text say it? *And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."*

Jesus spoke to the man what was most necessary, “your sins are forgiven.” That which has brought about your paralysis – is forgiven. That which brings this mortal life to an end – is forgiven. That which holds you in terror for eternity – your sinfulness – is forgiven. Did you notice that neither the friends nor the paralytic told Jesus, “Hey, what about healing the paralysis? Don’t you think that is more important than forgiveness? The paralytic and his friends knew the forgiveness was more important!

How do you prove that sins are forgiven by that spoken word? Let’s face it, there is no way to see that.

So, some of the Scribes (religious leaders who happened to be present to keep an eye on Jesus when He spoke) said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." Only God has the authority to forgive sins.

So, Jesus shows He has the authority to forgive sins, He tells the paralytic to pick up his mat and go home – and he did. Without sinfulness there is no death or illness. Death and illness are the outward evidence of the

complete corruption of human nature by sinfulness. Jesus forgives sin. Then Jesus' heals the man, that healing shows that He has authority over the cause of all illness and death – He has authority to forgive sin.

How important is forgiveness? Before Christ began His earthly ministry, John, his cousin, was preaching. What was John's preaching? The Gospel of Mark says, *He appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.* (Mk 1:4) How important is forgiveness? At the end of Christ's ministry, just before His ascension into heaven, He states it as the purpose of sending out His disciples? *...and He said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead on the third day; and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations..."* (Lk 24:46-47)

Dearly beloved of God, it is the joy of the church to be commanded by Christ, to pronounce the forgiveness He purchased with His innocent suffering and death. Jesus authorized His disciples when He appeared to them behind the locked doors of the upper room, on Easter Sunday. *"Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."* And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."* (Jn 20:21-23)

Jesus sent out His disciples to forgive and to retain sins - to forgive the sins of those who repent and to retain the sins of the unrepentant. The unrepentant are not to be forgiven in order that they might learn the severity of their sins. Without repentance, there is no forgiveness. Without forgiveness, there is no eternal life and no heaven. So, Christ commands the disciples to retain sins for the purpose of leading the impenitent to repentance. **But**, once people repent, they are to dispense that gift of forgiveness which truly frees people from their sin and gives to them eternal life and salvation.

Jesus tells His disciples to stick with preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins. That is what I have been called here by God to deliver to you. I am here to bring to you the good news of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I am called as your pastor to speak God's Word of truth to His people – His Law and His Gospel – repentance for the forgiveness of sin.

Dear friends, you may well ask, "What gives you the authority to speak forgiveness to me? What gives anybody the authority to speak forgiveness to another?" In our text, that is exactly the problem the Scribes had with Christ. They felt that only God could forgive sins. Christ is God! He gave Himself as the sacrifice for sin. He paid for the sins of all by giving up His life unto death – even death upon a cross. He shows to the disciples His authority to forgive by healing the paralytic. He shows us His authority to forgive by rising from the dead three days after He was crucified.

The authority to forgive sins comes from Christ. He commands that forgiveness be spoken to one another. He gave that authority to His disciples and sent them out to proclaim His word of forgiveness to His church. Today, His church is still under the same command – to forgive and to retain sins. It is Christ's church which calls pastors to speak those words of forgiveness to repentant sinners – to you and to me.

Dearly beloved, the authority to speak forgiveness comes from the Word of God who took on human flesh and dwelt among men, Jesus Christ. He took upon Himself your sins and mine so that we could be forgiven. Authority on earth to forgive sins, comes from the very Word of God made flesh. Wherever the Word of God is spoken, there is Christ present in the midst of them.

If you and I rely upon ourselves – looking at our good Christian lives – to determine whether we are in a good relationship with God or not, doubt will always arise. Christ does not want you to have any doubt. He wants you to know you are forgiven, that you have life eternal and salvation, He wants you to know that He is with you always, to the very end of the age.

You are gathered here where Christ is present as that very spoken Word. You are here where Christ comes to us

with His own body and blood. These are Christ's gifts to us here on earth by which He delivers the forgiveness of sins.

Do not despise the gifts of forgiveness among us. I invite you to partake of these gifts. I encourage you to rejoice in the forgiveness Christ won for you. I beg of you to give ear to God's authority on earth to forgive sins – both here this morning and even in private – if you have need to hear that word spoken to specific sins.

God's grace is indeed great, for He has blessed you by sending His Son to die once for your sins. He continues to bless you today, for in His stead and by His command – by Christ's authority – it is my privilege to proclaim to you today that your sins are forgiven you. In our text, they gave glory to God that He gave such authority to men – the authority to forgive sins. Give glory to God, for your sins are forgiven. You have life eternal. You will have perfect health in the resurrection, just like Christ. You know that your sins are forgiven – know that Christ is with you always – never forsaking or abandoning you. Go in peace. Amen.